

Why Zimbabweans Take a Back Seat in Enhanced Entrepreneurship

I most of the time write about the past of the Shona people. Today, I want us to look at the modern issues of interest to the African Zimbabweans. Our lot has been deplorable for a long time now, economically speaking. We have to be mindful that a simple African in times past was one proud and almost self-sufficient with his or her own cows and a piece of land. Resources like edible game were in abundance. The rivers were teeming with fish. The forests were full of fruit scents and birds chirping in the trees. Unity at family or clan level was the order of the day. *Chara chimwe hachihwanyi inda* (one finger cannot crush a louse) and *rume rimwe harikombi churu* (one man cannot encircle an anthill) were some of the tsumos or proverbs that can afford us a peek into the thinking and way of life of those days. *Nhimbe* or *humwe* was a sort of temporary co-operation by the community members to work in the fields at planting, weeding or harvesting times. Though the incentive could be beer, maheu and goat meat, people were practically happy to help their fellowman or fellowwoman. This can be contrasted with our Zimbabwe today, when the earth has been hard-hit by a hammer. In the past, *pasi risati rarobga nenyundo*, in the good old days, when everyone knew everybody, things were different to the now life of poverty, anguish and crime. In the following paragraphs, I pour my heart out on some of the solutions that can be taken aboard in order to alleviate the problems bedeviling us and our people.

I write this article as a lay person. As an observer within a country plagued by several economic, and hence social, problems, I have listened to the government and social rhetoric from the 1980s when they were talking of co-operative economic projects through the 90s when self-help projects topped the charts (silent on whether the mode was for private individuals or co-operatives) to the 00s when indigenization has been the buzz word. Despite all this, it appears Zimbabweans are involved in paltry proportions given all the business taking place in the country currently. I will point out why, from my perspective.

What has actually prodded me to write this is my envy of the procurement and supply chain within the Asian community within Southern Africa; which indigenous people in Zimbabwe may emulate.

Every year, unemployment levels are rising with detrimental effects on society. There are small businesses that we have been in like farming and mining. Informal trading has also increased. My focus is on how we can enhance what we have been doing all along and where possible venture into new territories. This part of the world is faced with low levels of manufacturing partly due to the unavailability of appropriate technology (machines and ideas). The Asian countries have been emerging with ideas that can be adapted for the African industry.

A cursory glance through Aliexpress, eBay, Amazon and Alibaba, one cannot help it but wonder as to the multiplicity of machines and items of business that are awash there. Simply noting these will create business ideas within one's mind. The following are some that have struck me.

Fruit dehydrators (both domestic and industrial)



Solar lamp



Electronic cables and Mobile phone gadgets



Sewing machines



Cultivators





Plough



Nail making machine

Clothes dryer





What am I saying? Look around your village, the global village, the internet world. Get business ideas and ideas on the technology you may use to implement the ideas. There are many, many, items for resale to be obtained from online shops. All other business variables equal, concerns can be established.

What also strikes one are the low prices for the purchasing of these items. However before one resolves to order and proceed to checking out, they have to look at the minimum order quantities (MOQ). These are the minimum number or quantities of items or amount of money needed to be met first for the online purchase to be accepted. These vary with items. The smaller and the lowly-priced they are, the bigger or higher the MOQ. While the majority can afford individual items very well, the MOQ is prohibitive and will leave them drooling and thinking; and that's all. Meanwhile poverty and under-employment continues.

It is the well-resourced business people who may be able to order these. Back home, they make a killing for these items solely because of the unfamed monopoly. The Asian communities could be no different from the struggling Zimbabweans. Zimbabweans are full of ideas (including me) but lack profitable implementation. The difference in their performance is in organizational ability. The Asians pool resources together for an item or sets of items. But I am yet to be shown a robust business association of indigenous Zimbabwean people taking bulls by their horns in this regard. The Asians easily beat the MOQ and therefore they get the items cheaply, much like we used to read about in secondary school as trade discount.

I was shopping around on eBay for an item which can be used for recreation and education. I contacted one supplier who offered to give me a free sample but quickly told me I would meet shipping cost on my own. I took a breath. What was the cost of shipping? A whopping USD20. For such a small item? Yes! That was that with this supplier. I couldn't order. So even in any

other deals which involve shipping from as far as China, the cost is prohibitive. This is only overcome by group funding of shipping in containers.

Once the goods land, the traders mill to the warehouse from across the region to say Harare or Johannesburg to collect their orders. The informal traders who go to buy wares from here will not be able to compete on selling price markups with these original procurers.

Another way to benefit from each other is to enhance networking, not for spreading gossip, but for business. An informal directory of the association or group members has to be drawn with each participant or member indicating their skills and what they can offer. This will ensure trade within groups and support for individual business ventures. An enterprising mentality has to be cultivated such that the less confident may also come out to provide service for a monetary benefit. The association can help to seek new markets.

The ideas are plain and simple but the logistics will require the able and the knowledgeable. The end result will be sweet and palatable. Who will tie the bell onto the cat?

cc/cc